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Threats to U.S. interests are developing new dimensions. America is increasingly challenged by regional instability, transnational dangers, asymmetric threats and the likelihood of unpredictable events.

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Special Operations Forces: The Way Ahead

Statement presented by Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, to the members of the command.

Having emerged from the Cold War as a uniquely postured superpower, America's armed forces stand at the threshold of a new millennium -- peering into a seething cauldron of global activity.

As we venture into an uncertain future, threats to U.S. interests are developing new dimensions. We are being increasingly challenged by regional instability, transnational dangers, asymmetric threats and the likelihood of unpredictable events -- threats that are not easily addressed by simple force-on-force calculations.

To meet these challenges, we must leverage the best capabilities and potential of our armed forces. This will be a difficult undertaking, for as Joint Vision 2010 counsels, "We will have to make hard choices to achieve the trade-offs that will bring the best balance, most capability and greatest interoperability for the least cost." America's special operations forces (SOF) have an important and growing role in addressing many of these challenges, and effectively satisfy[ing] the cost-benefit criteria.

Since being created by the Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the DoD Authorization Act of 1987, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has provided highly trained, rapidly deployable and regionally focused SOF in support of global requirements from the National Command Authorities, the geographic commanders in chief, and our American ambassadors and their country teams.

During 1997, SOF deployed to 144 countries around the world, with an average of 4,760 SOF personnel deployed per week -- a threefold increase in missions since 1991.

SOF consists of over 46,000 people, active and reserve, that are organized into a variety of land, sea and aerospace forces including:

- U.S. Army Special Forces, the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), psychological operations units and civil affairs units;
- U.S. Navy Sea-Air-Land forces (SEALs), special boat units and SEAL delivery units; and
- U.S. Air Force special operations squadrons (fixed and rotary wing), special tactics squadrons, a foreign internal defense squadron, and a combat weather squadron. Although the acronym SOF is used to describe this community of world-class organizations, no one joins "SOF" per se. Instead, they join one of the units above, each of which is unique in its history, culture and contribution to the joint SOF team -- and our nation is better served as a result of this diversity.

The legislation that created USSOCOM also specified certain SOF activities and assigned the command specific authorities and responsibilities. These tasks, similar to those assigned to the Services, include:

- Manage a separate program and budget (Major Force Program 11) for SOF-unique requirements;
- Conduct research, development and acquisition of SOF peculiar items;
- Develop joint SOF doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures;
- Conduct joint SOF specialized courses of instruction;
- Train all assigned forces and ensure joint interoperability;

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- Monitor the readiness of all assigned and forward deployed joint SOF; and
- Monitor the professional development of SOF personnel of all services. The first two tasks give USSOCOM great flexibility in training, equipping and employing its forces.

Our national military strategy requires our armed forces to advance national security by applying military power to help shape the international environment and respond to the full spectrum of crises, while also preparing now for an uncertain future.

SOF support this "shape, respond, prepare now" strategy by providing an array of expanded options, strategic economy of force, "tailor to task" capabilities -- and are particularly adept at countering transnational and asymmetrical threats.

SOF expand the options of the NCA and CinCs, particularly in crises that fall between wholly diplomatic initiatives and the overt use of large warfighting forces. Decision makers may choose SOF as an option because they provide the broadest range of capabilities that have direct applicability in an increasing number of missions, from major theater wars to smaller-scale contingencies to humanitarian assistance.

SOF allow decision makers the flexibility to tailor U.S. responses, lethal and nonlethal, to encompass this wide range of possibilities and reduce the risk of escalation associated with larger, more visible force deployments. Consequently, SOF may be the best choice for crises requiring immediate response or precise use of force, such as Operation Assured Response, the evacuation of 2,115 noncombatants from Liberia in 1996 with no loss of life.

SOF may be most effective in conducting economy of force operations, generating strategic advantage disproportionate to the resources they represent. For example, combat-ready Army Special Forces (SF) teams are routinely deployed around the world in support of peacetime engagement to prevent conflict and conserve resources.

By training host-nation forces to provide their own security, and using integrated civil affairs and psychological operations programs to strengthen government infrastructures, SF foster stability and help prevent local problems from developing into threats to international security. Should conflict arise, these "global scouts" can quickly transition to combat operations and spearhead decisive victory. As SOF engage in additional peacetime operations, it is important to remember that we are, first and foremost, warriors.

During conflict, SOF conduct operational and strategic missions that directly or indirectly support the joint force commander's campaign plan. Fully integrated into the joint campaign plan, SOF can attack high-value, time-sensitive targets throughout the battlespace to assist in rapidly achieving land, sea, air and space dominance. SOF also conduct information operations, train indigenous forces, assist conventional force management of civilians on the battlefield, and provide advisory and liaison capabilities to rapidly integrate coalition partners and leverage their unique qualities to enhance the capabilities of the entire force.

During post-conflict situations, SOF's training skills, coupled with civil affairs and psychological operations expertise, help speed the transition to normalcy, thereby allowing conventional forces to redeploy quickly. SOF use these same skills during peace operations, such as Haiti and Bosnia, to defuse volatile situations, provide "ground truth" to commanders and assist in the development of post-hostilities controls.

SOF is rapidly adaptable to a broad and constantly varying range of tasks and conditions. This organizational agility allows SOF to quickly concentrate synergistic effects from widely dispersed locations and assist joint force commanders in achieving decisive results without the need for time-consuming and risky massing of people and equipment. Even under the most austere conditions, SOF can conduct 24-hour, multidimensional operations to penetrate denied or sensitive areas and resolve terrorist activity, pre-empt the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or strike key targets with precision and discrimination.

Although a potent military force, SOF can often accomplish their mission without resorting to the use of force. SOF training skills combined with language proficiency, cultural awareness, regional orientation and an understanding of the political context of their missions make SOF unique in the U.S. military — true "warrior-diplomats." Moreover, this broad array of versatile capabilities allow SOF to "tailor to task" and operate effectively in any situation or environment.

SOF use this expertise to assist our American ambassadors and the geographic CinCs in influencing situations favorably toward U.S. national interests through recurring interaction with current and potential allies. During FY [fiscal year] 97, SOF conducted 17 crisis response operations, 194 counterdrug missions, and humanitarian demining operations in 11 countries. In

addition to these real-world requirements, SOF maintained a robust exercise schedule, participating in 224 combined exercises for training in 91 countries around the world. This proactive peacetime engagement allows SOF to help host nations meet their legitimate defense needs while encouraging regional cooperation, maintaining U.S. access, and visibly demonstrating the role of a professional military in a democratic society.

SOF's ability to help mold the international environment, rather than merely responding to it, is our most important day-to-day contribution to national security and represents our "steady state" for the future.

U.S. conventional military dominance encourages future adversaries and competitors ranging from established nations to nonstate groups, such as terrorists, insurgents and new and unpredictable extremists, to avoid direct military confrontation with the United States. Instead, they will use asymmetric means such as WMD, information warfare, terrorism, taking the fight to urban areas, or the application of technological or operational surprise to offset our conventional advantages and achieve their goals -- even posing a direct threat to the U.S. homeland.

Moreover, an adversary already engaged in conventional warfare with the U.S. could still employ these means to gain temporary or localized battlespace parity or asymmetrical advantage.

The asymmetric challenge with the gravest potential facing the U.S. today is the threat posed by the global proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery. In recognition of the significant dangers associated with WMD, the Department of Defense assigned SOF some specific responsibilities in May 1995 in support of the broader interagency task of preventing the proliferation of WMD.

Today, counterproliferation has been given top operational priority at USSOCOM. CP includes actions taken to locate, identify, seize, destroy, render safe or transport WMD. We are pursuing several approaches to address the WMD threat, including working with the geographic CinCs to determine how best to bring SOF's capabilities to bear in support of theater CP objectives. We continue to refine our tactics, techniques and procedures in order to allow engagement of the full range of WMD targets including nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, improvised devices, means of delivery and supporting infrastructure.

Another serious asymmetric reality is information-based conflict. The power of information is growing exponentially and the increasing dependence of the U.S. and its adversaries on information presents many vulnerabilities and opportunities.

In the past, information operations were the "punctuation" on the grammar of conflict -- enhancing the impact of the military, diplomatic and economic effort. Today, the military often augments the other elements of national power to "punctuate" information operations -- adding support, emphasis and authority.

The Information Age has also opened up a wide range of new opportunities, seemingly endless possibilities and significant vulnerabilities for SOF. Accordingly, we are examining new ways to enhance our capabilities to ensure uninterrupted information exchange, reduce an adversary's ability to use information and influence situations to support mission accomplishment. These capabilities range from passive defense to psychological operations to precision strike operations against key information nodes.

The revolutionary capabilities offered by Information Age technologies are forcing us away from traditional assumptions about SOF organization and even the conduct of operations. For example, future psychological operations will employ a "CNN Central" approach -- deploying small teams that can reach back to a supporting network of expertise and disseminate information quickly over satellites, the Internet, television, radio and other media.

Meanwhile, the explosive growth of commercial information technologies has made it possible for terrorist organizations, crime syndicates and drug cartels to organize, plan and coordinate activities from multiple locations around the world. With ties to rogue states, corrupt public officials and business organizations, these transnational entities can target many important public infrastructures (financial institutions, air traffic control systems, energy grids, telecommunications networks), U.S. military forces and American citizens.

One consequence of this increased connectivity will be the creation of "distributed" threats and conflicts that will make national boundaries irrelevant. Given this threat evolution, SOF will operate with increasing autonomy within the commander's intent -- relying on distributed C2 [command and control], technology templating, and information avenues of approach to locate and neutralize widely dispersed targets with both cyber and kinetic weapons. Maintaining OPSEC

[operations security] and employing deception will be critical as our own digitized signatures multiply.

Clearly, those who can exploit rapid advances in information and information-related technologies stand to gain significant advantages, and the most momentous changes in this sector are yet to come. But technology alone is not the answer. We must also capture the true "art" of information operations -- the techniques typified in the "reality manipulation" employed daily by the marketing and advertising behemoths of Hollywood and Madison Avenue.

The capabilities required to counter WMD, conduct information operations and deal with other transnational and asymmetric threats are extremely resource intensive and in some cases dependent upon the continued development of revolutionary technologies.

Equally important is the development and continued adaptation of definitive U.S. policy for addressing these and other emerging threats. These efforts will be critical to ensuring that SOF have the resources and increasingly sophisticated capabilities required to dominate any form of conflict. Considerable progress has already been made in each of these areas. Much, however, remains to be done.

USSOCOM faces an operational environment characterized by accelerating geopolitical change, rapid technological advancement, evolving threats, constrained resources and potential new roles. These factors require innovative thinking and new ways to shape change if we are to provide the widest array of options in protecting America's interests. And the truth is, business as usual will not provide the capabilities we need to deal with the transnational and asymmetric opponents of tomorrow.

A rapidly changing world deals ruthlessly with organizations that do not change -- and USSOCOM is no exception. Guided by a comprehensive, enduring vision and supporting goals, we must constantly reshape ourselves to remain relevant and useful members of the joint team. As the president of AT&T once said, "When the pace of change outside an organization becomes greater than the pace of change inside the organization, the end is near."

This reality means that USSOCOM must embrace and institutionalize the process of change in a disciplined manner that allows us to move closer to our vision. During this journey, only our core values are permanent and non-negotiable. Everything else -- our organization, force structure, platforms, equipment and missions -- must continuously evolve to meet the needs of the nation and seize the opportunities brought about by change.

To be relevant in the future, we must continue our transformation, while maintaining the readiness required to shape and respond to the world today. We need to anticipate trends and future scenarios, conditioning ourselves to not be surprised by surprise and the rapidity of change and the dynamics that follow. As new threats arise, we must decide which of our current capabilities to retain or modify, which new ones to develop, and which old ones to discard.

SOF must focus on emerging threats that either exceed the capabilities of conventional forces or can be dealt with better by small, highly specialized units. We must carefully assess those threats and, as appropriate, provide an effective solution through strategic planning, resourcing, acquisition and operational support initiatives. As important, we must identify those missions no longer relevant for SOF and recommend shifting these missions to our conventional forces in order to better focus resources on critical special operations activities.

SOF must be a full-spectrum, multimission force -- providing a comprehensive set of capabilities to the nation. This means that we must swiftly adapt to diverse and evolving threats from less technologically advanced adversaries to peer competitors. We must continue to operate effectively in joint, combined and interagency environments, yet must transcend these traditional parameters to fuse all of America's political, military, economic, intellectual, technical and cultural strengths into a comprehensive approach to future challenges. This will allow SOF to tap into such diverse areas as commercial information technologies, utilization of space, biomedicine, environmental science, robotics, organizational design and commercial research and development.

The 21st century SOF warrior -- selectively recruited and assessed, mature, superbly trained and led -- will remain the key to success in special operations. These warriors must be proficient in core competencies, training for certainty while educating for uncertainty. We must be capable of conducting strategic operations in tactical environment, combining a warrior ethos with language proficiency, cultural awareness, political sensitivity and the ability to use Information Age technology.

We must also have the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative, useful solutions to ambiguous

problems and provide a coherent set of choices to the supported CinC or joint force commander -- more often like Sun Tzu, less like Clausewitz. This means training and educating people how to think, not just what to think.

SOF must examine every advantage our technological genius can supply and selectively exploit those few required for success. We cannot afford purely materiel fixes to every future problem; therefore, we must leverage those critical technologies that give us a decided advantage.

We must be quick to capitalize on emerging technologies with the potential for significantly enhancing the human dimension, especially low-observable/masking technologies, smarter weapons, long-range precision capability and information technologies.

Merging technology with the human dimension will improve the SOF warrior's survivability, lethality, mobility and ability to access and use all relevant information sources.

We must also recognize that the benefits of technological change cannot be fully realized until they are incorporated into new organizational forms. SOF organizational innovation is as important as innovation in weapon systems. Replacing technology without replacing old structures will not work. Most importantly, we must remember that the purpose of technology is to equip the man, not simply to man the equipment.

SOF people are at the heart of all special operations; platforms and equipment merely help them accomplish the mission. The fingers on our future triggers still must be controlled by willing warriors of courage, compassion and judgment -- individuals of character with strong legal, moral and ethical foundation -- organized into dynamic and agile joint SOF teams.

As USSOCOM moves into the 21st century, we are evolving to meet future challenges and sustain the relative capability advantage that we enjoy today. USSOCOM is already considering new and innovative methods of assessing and developing people, is debating possible changes in doctrine, roles, missions and force structure, is preparing an investment plan for modernization and streamlined acquisition that leverages the Revolution in Military Affairs and Business Affairs, and is examining new operational concepts for the conduct of special operations in future environments.

USSOCOM headquarters is leading this change by transitioning from a traditional military staff to an Information Age staff that is matrix-shaped around core functions, more flexible and better postured to resource and support global SOF requirements.

We cannot know with certainty who our foes will be or precisely what demands will be placed on us in the future. However, in a time of both uncertainty and opportunity, USSOCOM will continue to provide our nation with the means to protect our interests and promote a peace that benefits America and the democratic ideals that we cherish.

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